



BRIEFING: April 4, 2013, BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM #3

TO: Chairman Richard and Board Members

FROM: Mark McLoughlin, Deputy Director for Environmental Planning

DATE: March 29, 2013

RE: Merced to Fresno Section Supplemental Alternatives Analysis Report:
Central Valley Wye

Background

The purpose of this presentation is to update the Board on work accomplished by Authority staff and its regional consultant since January 2013 on identifying a reasonable range of Wye alternatives to study in the Merced to Fresno Subsequent EIR/Supplemental EIS (SEIR/SEIS) and to obtain the Board's concurrence.

Discussion

On May 3, 2012, the Board certified the Merced to Fresno Section High-Speed Train Project Final EIR/EIS, and selected the Hybrid as the north-south alignment between Merced and Fresno. The FRA issued its Record of Decision (ROD) for the document on September 18, 2012, also selecting the Hybrid north-south alignment. Neither the Authority nor the FRA selected a Wye connection as part of their decisions. Rather, consistent with statements in the Draft and Final EIR/EISs, the Authority and FRA indicated that further evaluation of the Wye would occur as part of the San Jose to Merced Section EIR/EIS prior to a Wye selection.

In late 2012, Authority staff recognized an opportunity to possibly extend early construction further north to Merced, rather than Avenue 17 in Madera Acres as originally anticipated, and identified selection of the Central Valley Wye as a necessary component. As a result, in January 2013, staff presented to the Authority Board a strategy to focus work on the Central Valley Wye and to conduct the necessary environmental review as a follow-on to the Merced to Fresno EIR/EIS. This approach will result in what is called a Subsequent EIR and Supplemental EIS (SEIR/SEIS) for the Merced to Fresno Section, and it is anticipated that this document can proceed more quickly than a full San Jose to Merced Section EIR/EIS.

As part of the January 23, 2013, informational update to the Authority Board, staff showed the 14 potential wye alignments originally considered and identified six alignments that merited further consideration based on data and input received from local and regional agencies and the

public. Since then, the Authority and regional consultant have continued working with stakeholders to identify ways to optimize the east-west (wye) options to connect with the north-south Hybrid Alternative. Based on this ongoing stakeholder engagement, public feedback, input from the regulatory agencies, and further analysis of the alternatives, staff has narrowed the recommended range of alternatives down to four: three of the six recommended alignments shown in January, and one alternative from the original 14, which has been reintroduced and recommended for further study. The four alternatives extend from Carlucci Road on the west, to Ranch Road/SR 99 on the north, and Avenue 17/BNSF on the south (the connection point to Construction Package #1 for the ICS).

On March 20th and 27th, 2013, the Authority hosted two Community Meetings, one in Fairmead and one in Chowchilla, to share findings and gather additional public and stakeholder input on the range of Wye alternatives. The attendees were interested in understanding the effects of road closures and realignments to the area and the process that reduced the range of Wye alternatives from 14 to four alignments. Many property owners sought to understand the potential impacts to residential, business and agricultural properties and the right-of-way process. The attendees reviewed maps of the four Wye alternatives and expressed preferences to the Authority, albeit mixed. Several attendees were also interested in the Authority's Small Business Program and job opportunities.

Authority staff will present the SAA and the results of public engagement to the Board on April 4th, 2013. The presentation will include the steps necessary for including the four wye alternatives in the Merced to Fresno SEIR/SEIS, including obtaining concurrence from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Recommendations

It is recommended that four alignment and wye configurations be carried forward and evaluated in the Merced to Fresno Section SEIR/SEIS. The four alternatives recommended to be carried forward are:

- SR 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye Alternative
- SR 152 (North) to Road 18 Wye Alternative
- SR 152 (South) to Road 18 Wye Alternative
- Avenue 21 to Road 13 Wye Alternative

Attachments

Supplemental Alternatives Analysis Report Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye Alternatives (April 2013)